Strengthening Skills and Employability in the Pacific

ILO Office for the Pacific Island Countries
Title: Strengthening Skills and Employability in the Pacific

Countries: 5 countries in the Pacific: Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) and Vanuatu

Administrative unit: ILO Office for Pacific Island Countries, Suva, Fiji

Responsible ILO Official: Trevor Riordan, Director a.i.
ILO Office for Pacific Island Countries, Suva, Fiji
Telephone: +679 3313866
Email: riordan@ilo.org

Collaborating ILO Units/Offices: SKILLS-AP, EMP/ENT, EMP/SKILLS, ACTRAV, ACTEMP and Gender Bureau

External Implementing Partners (if any): Department of Labour, Ministry of Education, training institutions, NGOs, Secretariat of the Pacific Community

Budget: USD$5 Million for 3 – year period (2010-2012)
1. **Rationale and Justification**

The Pacific region is certainly heterogeneous. However there are features which have been identified as key concerns over the years and need to be addressed to ensure that skills development can contribute to long term positive development within the identified countries. Extensive research within the region (ADB, 2007; ILO 2008; Duncan et al. 2007, 2009) repeatedly emphasized the importance of addressing the following aspects:

- skills mismatch;
- the need for improved labour market information particularly for planning skills development programs to meet local and overseas demand in employment;
- the need for skills development to be incorporated into all government policies (e.g. development policy, environment policies etc);
- improved skills training for young people to enable them to be more adaptable in relation to the likely employment situation;
- focus on regional technical support for small island countries in conjunction with the University of the South Pacific and the Australia Pacific Technical College;
- the need for improved access to training for vulnerable/excluded groups (women, youth, regional differences, disabled, informal sector, isolated communities etc.) through more flexible access to existing training institutions and outreach programs and with support from NGOs;
- skills recognition to support participants in skills migration programs;
- development of customized approaches for flexible and quality training delivery to the out-of school workforce and informal economy workers;
- improved quality of training by both public and private training providers; and
- the need for increased involvement of the private sector in skills training.

Many Pacific Island Countries (PICs) face the challenge of responding to the employment and training needs of their growing and often very young workforces. Lack of employment opportunities in the formal sector are paramount and economic opportunities are limited in most PIC economies. Consequently, unemployment rates are high, particularly for youth and women, and the majority of the workforce has limited access to skills development and is active in the informal economy (Duncan et al. 2009, ADB, 2007). It is likely that there will be a continuing shortage of employment opportunities in the formal sector and therefore, employment alternatives (self-employment, enterprise development etc.) needs to be seriously considered. Further, out-emigration of skilled workers is expected to further increase in the years to come. This will create an ongoing need for training in particular sectors as a consequence of skilled labour shortages in sending countries. Consequently, training systems need to be flexible to meet changing market requirements.

While progress has been made and emphasis has been put on improvement of the delivery, relevance and effectiveness of TVET systems, most of the countries still struggle with skills mismatch, forecasting and standard setting. Further, the question of equity and access for the above mentioned groups remains a major challenge. A meager 5-10% of the workforce has had access to vocational training, which is a serious concern for the region. With some exceptions, employability of trainees has also been a concern. Geographical access due to distance between islands are additional challenges, while youth in general and from poor income groups in particular, then women and people with disabilities are particularly excluded.

Further, the design of vocational training systems fails to provide adequate re-entry opportunities for older students and rarely responds to the training needs (further education) of workers later in life.

---

1 Practically all Pacific countries face labour shortages of skilled and trained workforce.
their careers. This is particularly relevant as skills development a) is increasingly considered to be related to international labour markets and b) is to be inclusive to ensure equity and reduce poverty. As national skills strategies and policies are to be developed and integrated in overall development strategies, a skilled workforce which is adaptable and has access to continuous learning is essential for the overall competitiveness of any economy. Delivering relevant, flexible and high quality training for employability, either through the formal vocational training systems or informal training partners is critical. This training system, which will recognize skills and prior learning, lies at the core of the project and reflects the requirements of the region. It also includes further adult learning and education and a training system which is accessible to the workforce at various stages in life.

While certain of the project countries may previously have formulated a skills development strategy, these have rarely been operationalised to the extent that they fulfill the long term vision of an inclusive human resources plan. The overall objective of the project is to support selected PICs to develop such a strategy, which is based on strong labour market information systems and skills needs assessments and provides the foundation for market-based, inclusive training delivery.

An additional concern is the effectiveness and efficiency of TVET systems and their required link to employability. Development of market relevant qualification standards, post-training career guidance and active support for self-employment will be addressed on a pilot basis. Further, the role of quality assurance in informal training provision through TVET and inclusiveness will be addressed. The system will also be adjusted to meet the training needs of people with disabilities and out of school youth. These are additional challenges to increase outreach within TVET and through private training providers.

2. Strategic fit

The Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) of PNG, RMI and Samoa explicitly list skills development and development of HRD policies as key priorities (PNG Priority 4.1, RMI DWCP priority outline, chapter 3; Samoa: Outcome 2.1/2.2). Further, employment creation, particularly emphasizing the urgency of youth employment has been a key area of concern in the DWCPs of the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Employment creation necessarily requires skills development.

This project responds to the national priorities identified in the DWCPs, with a clear focus on employment creation for young men and women. Skills Development has further been identified as the central vehicle to achieve sustainable employment and income, and to ensure increased productivity and international competitiveness. Consequently, skills development and training, emphasizing the need to address youth employment, migration and the informal sector have been a central priority for the member countries and the constituents of the region for some time (SKILLS-AP, 2007 and SKILLS-AP, 2008). These areas have further been identified as critical in mitigating the negative effects of the current financial crisis.
3. Project Strategy

The overall objective of the project is to address the systemic weaknesses of existing Human Resource Development strategies and TVET systems to:

1) be inclusive, meet training and employment needs and address skills mismatches in the region, and reach out to;

2) out of school youth and school drop outs, informal sector workers, people with disabilities and the adult workforce, particularly women (wage and self employed) for further education.

Employability and access to lifelong learning are key aspects which have gained increasing importance in recent years. It is the long term vision to integrate Skills Development into the overall Human Resources Development Strategy, to ensure more responsive training delivery, while building the institutional capabilities of the social partners to be more actively involved in quality assurance and delivery. The intervention will emphasize inclusiveness, improved access to relevant training and the strong linkages to employability and self-employment. This can be achieved through the strategy set out below:

1. Promote and Support Member States in the Development of National Human Resource Development Strategies

Promote and support PIC member states and their constituents to build institutional capacity to develop a mechanism that supports a market oriented, inclusive Human Resource Development Strategy through:

- identification of skills needs and skills mismatch, based on better and more systematic development and utilization of labour market information;
- identification of training needs and developing respective interventions according to those needs; and
- training workshops on data analysis and skills needs assessments and documentation.

ILO support in (re-)formulation of a national skills (HR) development plan focused on increasing the role of pre-vocational and vocational skills for employability and lifelong learning, as part of an overall inclusive development strategy. Disability, youth employment and informal sector and gender specific skills requirements would also be mainstreamed into the overall skills development plan.

The national HRD strategy should take into account skills needs related to outward migration and employability within destination countries, particularly for PICs involved in seasonal migration schemes in New Zealand or Australia. This will in some cases mean developing two pathways, although there will be many common elements.

The policy will also take into account the needs of people in outer islands or in areas with difficult access and may include strategies to provide accommodation support near training institutions or trainers traveling to provide specific training programs.

The policy should include capacity building for NGOs and social partners and should promote cooperation and complementarities with regional organizations, such as the Australian Pacific Technical College and the University of the South Pacific.

Special reference should be made to the particular problems of young people. As many youth leaders seek study or employment overseas, the national strategy should address the need to
develop leadership skills in those who choose to stay within the country

2. Reform training systems through: stronger involvement of social partners; increased market orientation; development of Competency Standards; focus on quality delivery and stronger quality assurance

- Support consistent application of national qualifications frameworks through:
  - competency based assessment systems;
  - systems and strategies for the recognition of prior learning;
  - flexible modular-based systems developed to match the needs of students traveling from outer islands to receive training;
  - support for students from outer islands attending short term training sessions;
  - review or development of quality assurance systems; and
  - adaptation of ILO Regional Model Competency Standards to match local skills requirements.

- Strengthen Public Private Partnerships and Social Partners and increase consultation with industry to ensure more needs based, relevant training in areas such as:
  - design of training and standards;
  - delivery and quality assurance; and
  - support in placement or self employment and enterprise development.

- Post-Training and Counseling Services: Support TVET system to provide improved career development support (for local employment, self-employment and overseas wage employment), which enables working population and low skilled informal sector workers and other vulnerable groups to (re-)enter TVET and related training providers for skills up-grading.

- Review and upgrade management systems as required

- Develop training modules to support project implementation:
  - re generic employability skills relevant to PICs;
  - through review or development of training materials for self employment;
  - provide support for TVET and private training providers in developing trade specific modular training that is:
    a) flexible;
    b) short term and contextual/needs based;
    c) less instructional and more facilitative;
    d) inclusive (sensitization and training on gender and access to training, disability and access to training and informal sector and access to training for all, 'Training of Trainers', Trainers and students);
    e) decentralized and context based, with more outreach; and
    f) in specific relevant sectors (contextual as per the needs). This also includes standards for numeracy/literacy, core skills and pre-vocational skills plus counseling support and self employment/enterprise development.

3. Provide Support for more inclusive skills development within TVET system

- Capacity building to improve gender balance and the integration of people with disabilities within TVET by:
  - assisting in developing strategies;
  - budgeting for accommodation and needs based adjustments of infrastructure for people with disabilities; and
  - providing training.

- Strengthening linkages between formal and informal training providers for increased access to
training for employment and higher formalization of skills development in the informal economy by:

- assisting TVET providers in the overall improvement of quality of delivery and effectiveness in training and skills development, and in strengthening partnerships with informal training providers;
- capacity building of training providers at various levels in planning, delivery and assessments of community based modular training and assessment;
- supporting TVET and private training providers in understanding, adaptation and implementation of ILO Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) tool for rural and semi-urban self employment at pilot level (taking advantage of ongoing implementation of TREE through the Youth Employment Project).

- Identification of areas where a modular flexible curriculum and various teaching, learning and assessment tools are most needed by:
  - conducting targeted training programmes for vulnerable groups such as:
    - women: ensuring increased access to formal and informal “skills up” gradation in traditional/non-traditional trades and flexible needs based delivery, and monitoring gender sensitive training delivery and design;
    - people with disabilities: supporting specialised training institutions and mainstreaming, building institutional capacities within TVET and private training providers to monitor and deliver training for employability;
    - youth (out of school and school drop outs); and
    - informal sector workers.
  - TREE implementation focusing on vulnerable groups to identify sustainable income opportunities as defined above;
  - reviewing ongoing youth employment initiatives and their impact on employability or quality of self-employment.

4. Comparative advantage and partnerships

The ILO is a leading international agency on skills development and employment promotion. The ILO has extensive experience in this area of policy development and technical cooperation at various levels of skills development. This includes the development and integration of skills policies in overall development strategies, to address skills mismatches and the need for market-oriented skills development to improve competitiveness. ILO experience also extends to long-year policy, technical cooperation to address challenges related to efficiency and effectiveness of TVET systems, Employment Services, Labour Market Information, capacity building of social partners (particularly government and private sector) and skills and employability needs of vulnerable groups.

The ILO has developed integrated and well tested methodologies on youth training for employability, local economic development (LED), enterprise development (SYB, KYB, SIYB) and skill development in rural areas of the informal economy (CBT/TREE) as well as extensive activities in the area of workplace learning. The TREE methodology has been recommended and implemented for poverty eradication in many parts of the world. The Toolkit for TREE has recently been adapted for the Pacific and will soon be operational.

Competency based modular training and relevant standards have been tested in particular sectors across Asia and have proven to be suitable to address training needs in the region, including with respect to informal sector workers and in recognizing prior learning. Ongoing ILO policy and technical cooperation work in Asia and the Pacific to address skills mismatches, youth employment challenges and the particular training and enterprise development requirements of vulnerable groups such as women (i.e. WEDGE), people with disabilities (i.e. INCLUDE) and migrant workers are additional tools and methodologies which will be incorporated according to
the specific requirements.

The focus of the intervention lies in increasing a) the effectiveness and quality of formal training providers and b) access to formal and informal skills training, while ensuring that training is relevant, of high quality, flexible and accessible. Further, where required the strong component in TREE of pre-and post training support as well as basic numeracy and literacy can be utilized. This would include basic entrepreneurial skills and institutionalization of the same for rural and semi-urban areas. This would in turn contribute to the sustainability of the intervention.

Further, the ILO has enjoyed a long-term presence and continuous work in the Pacific in the areas of employment and skills development. Policy advice on TVET and technical cooperation projects, particularly focused on vulnerable groups, such as women, unemployed youth and child labourers were and continue to be key priorities for the ILO. A “Sub-Regional Programme on Education, Employability and Decent Work for Youth in Pacific Island Countries” (RAS/06/53/NET), referred to in this concept note as the Pacific Youth Employment Programme or YEP is ongoing and is currently being implemented in five PICs (Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu).

As part of its regional activities (Skills AP) during the last 5 years, the ILO has facilitated regular exposure and workshops in the areas of skills needs, skills mismatch, competency standards, workplace learning and skills and employability for young people in the Asia/Pacific region.

In the Pacific the ILO is actively participating in various regional fora to promote youth employment, the rights of migrant workers and people with disabilities. These include the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Pacific Youth Council and their networks, UN agencies (i.e. UNESCAP) and the UN Thematic Working Groups.

Finally, the ILO can actively take advantage of its specialized in-house resources and departments such as the Gender Bureau, International Training Centre (ITC) in Turin, ACTRAV, ACT-EMP, EMP/ENT and EMP/SKILLS. The ILO can also seek support from its tripartite constituents at national level, including relevant government agencies such as the Labour Ministries, workers’ and employers’ organizations.

5. Timing

The project will be implemented during a 3 year period between 2010 and 2013. The project will require funding of approximately USD$5,000,000, which includes some resources to make infrastructure adjustments in Training Centres for people with disabilities.

Day-to-day activities will be administered by a project manager and supported by 2-3 project staff members. Together these staff members will form the project management, which will be based in the ILO’s Suva Office, with technical backstopping support provided by relevant departments at ILO Headquarters in Geneva and at the Regional office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP). The project manager will be responsible for internal monitoring and evaluating day-to-day progress of the project. Furthermore, the project will submit annual progress reports to ILO HQ / ROAP in the role of main responsible agency and to an overall steering committee consisting of all implementation partners, an observer from the donor agency and two seats, which will be assigned to representatives of national constituents on rotation in each of the member countries. The steering committee will furthermore have responsibility for providing guidance and advice to the project. Finally, project management will provide a mid-term review and will organize a final independent evaluation, as per the ILO rules.

Through the strong involvement of social partners in the planning of a national Skills Development Strategy and monitoring of overall process of delivery, the project will facilitate and institute long-term national ownership. This will be supported by the project’s strong focus on capacity building in relevant national and regional bodies and the production of manuals. With
regard to key results, ownership is guaranteed through continuing involvement (including the period after the project) given the relevance of skills development in the overall development strategy.

6. Other information


Decent Work Country Programme Documents for RMI (Draft), PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.


### Annex A: Programme and Budget 2010-11 outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Protection</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Outcome 1 Employment Promotion: More women and men have access to productive employment, decent work and income opportunities</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 4 Social Security: More people have access to better managed and more gender equitable social security benefits</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 9 Employers’ Organizations: Employers have strong, independent and representative organizations</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 14 Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining: The right to freedom of association and collective bargaining is widely known and exercised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ Outcome 2 Skills Development: Skills development increases the employability of workers, the competitiveness of enterprises, and the inclusiveness of growth</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 5 Working Conditions: Women and men have better and more equitable working conditions</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 10 Workers’ Organizations: Workers have strong, independent and representative organizations</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 15 Forced Labour: Forced labour is eliminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Outcome 3 Sustainable Enterprises: Sustainable enterprises create productive and decent jobs</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 6 Occupational Safety and Health: Workers and enterprises benefit from improved safety and health conditions at work</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 11 Labour Administration and Labour Law: Labour administrations apply up to date labour legislation and provide effective services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Outcome 7 Labour Migration: More migrant workers are protected and more migrant workers have access to productive employment and decent work</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 8 HIV/AIDS: The world of work responds effectively to the HIV/AIDS epidemic</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 12 Social Dialogue and Industrial Relations: Tripartism and strengthened labour market governance contribute to effective social dialogue and sound industrial relations*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Outcome 8 HIV/AIDS: The world of work responds effectively to the HIV/AIDS epidemic</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 13 Decent Work in Economic Sectors: A sector-specific approach to decent work is applied</td>
<td>☐ Outcome 17 Discrimination at Work: Discrimination in employment and occupation is eliminated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Policy coherence

| Outcome 19 Mainstreaming Decent Work: Member States place an integrated approach to decent work at the heart of their economic and social policies, supported by key UN and other multilateral agencies |

---

*Outcome 12 Social Dialogue and Industrial Relations: Tripartism and strengthened labour market governance contribute to effective social dialogue and sound industrial relations*